

**REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon. Thank you to the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development for having me and it's great to be here with all of you. This is my first time at RES, and I believe this is the first time that the head of the Federal Communications Commission has *ever* spoken at this event.

But that is not the only first I want to draw your attention to today. Because while I'm at it, I'll note that I am the first woman confirmed to lead the FCC in history. It took 87 years to do it, so I'm going to make up for lost time.

That means acting now to address the state of communications infrastructure in Indian Country. It means recognizing that when we talk about economic growth in the digital age, we need to make sure every dialogue includes Native communities that in the past have been underserved and overlooked.

I know. Because while this may be my first time at RES, it is not my first time meeting with you in your communities. Since I joined the FCC, I have been to Tribal lands near and far, from here in Nevada to New Mexico, Hawaii, and Alaska. Just last month I was in California, about four hours southwest of here, visiting with the Morongo Band of Mission Indians.

I have made it a priority for the FCC to be more present and more accessible in Indian Country. Because the connections we make are going to help us work with you to bring high-speed internet to Tribal communities everywhere.

But getting out and visiting Indian Country is only part of it. Because we are taking a fresh approach to Tribal issues in-house. To do this, we redesigned the FCC's Office of Native Affairs and Policy. To lead our revamped office, we brought on Bambi Kraus, who many of you know from her decades of experience working on Tribal issues. When we announced she was joining the Commission, we also laid out a new set of priorities for this office. I want to touch on two of our biggest priorities today and talk about what we are doing to advance them.

The first is universal access. Connecting everyone, everywhere is at the heart of the FCC's mission. No matter who you are or where you live, you need access to modern communications to have a fair shot at 21st century success. And too many people in Indian Country have been waiting too long for this access.

We have a lot going on to change that. For starters, we are mapping with precision where broadband is and is not.

In the past, the FCC's broadband maps have been a patchwork with information gaps that made it hard for policymakers to send support to those areas that need it most.

Why was that? Well, a major flaw with these earlier maps is that they relied exclusively on data collected from broadband providers. There was no mechanism for feedback from local households and governments. There was no way for consumers or Tribes to tell us what was wrong on these maps, what was missing, where a provider might have said they were offering service but evidence on the ground demonstrated pretty clearly they were not. We're changing that. We are in the process of releasing new maps, and these new maps are subject to challenges by consumers, states, localities, and Native Nations. These maps—which come out twice a year—are designed to be iterative and improve over time. We want to keep working with Tribes to continue to evolve these maps for Indian Country, so they can be a tool we all use to better target support to close the digital divide.

Like I said, that is just for starters. Let's go a level deeper and talk about what we have done to support wireless service—and self-determination in Tribal communities. I'm going to get technical for a moment, so stick with me. The 2.5 GHz band is a special slice of our airwaves. It has the mix of capacity and coverage that makes it especially well-suited for next-generation wireless service, like 5G. Now in too many past generations of wireless service, Native Lands were among the last areas to have access to new wireless technology. Not so here. Because we did something different. We set up what we call a Tribal Priority Window to directly grant spectrum licenses to rural Tribes. In fact, we have granted 336 of them. That's historic. Because they can use these airwaves to help build broadband access themselves and ensure their communities get a fair shot in the digital age.

I want to give you a sense of just what a big deal this effort is and what it means for Tribes that want to build their own networks, make their own connections, and forge their own economic future. Five years ago, the Government Accountability Office issued a report identifying 18 Tribal entities that held spectrum licenses. Just 18. Today, as a result of our efforts, including the 2.5 GHz band, more than 80 percent of Federally-recognized Tribes have licensed spectrum. That is real change—and real opportunity.

Another opportunity I want to call your attention to involves Tribal Libraries. There are several hundred Tribal libraries in the United States. I think every one of them should be connected to high-speed broadband. And now we have a program—called E-Rate—that we are retooling to help them do it.

E-Rate has been around since the Telecommunications Act of 1996. It is designed to help support high-speed internet service in schools and libraries everywhere in the United States.

A while back, I visited the Santo Domingo Pueblo library in New Mexico. The library is surrounded by dry hills and is a long way from the nearest city. With the help of E-rate funds the Tribe was able to build high-speed internet service that reached the reservation—and the library became a bustling activity center. When this happens, economic development can follow. Because by bringing broadband to the library, it becomes incrementally less expensive to deploy to the homes and businesses nearby.

When I left, I remember thinking this is terrific, why can't we do this in Tribal libraries everywhere? It turned out many Tribal libraries were shut off from E-Rate support because they didn't meet the technical definition of a library in FCC rules. So I had the FCC fix it—and change our rules so more Tribal libraries everywhere can participate. Then we started a Pilot Program to help new applicants seeking E-Rate support by providing one-on-one assistance with the application process. We also kicked off a rulemaking to ask Tribes and providers what other changes we can make to E-Rate so more Tribal libraries can participate and benefit from the connections the program provides.

So the first priority is access. The second is affordability. If we want everyone, everywhere connected, we need to talk about more than just deployment—we need to talk about making sure broadband service is affordable. Because if we want to close the digital divide, we have to find ways to help households making hard choices about gas and groceries get online and stay online.

To do this we now have the Affordable Connectivity Program. It's a big deal. It's the largest broadband affordability effort in history—and it is run by the FCC.

Here's how it works. Eligible low-income households can get discounts of up to \$30 a month off their broadband bill. But on Tribal lands, that discount goes up to \$75 a month. On top of that, households can get a one-time \$100 discount off of a computer or tablet.

We now have 17 million households enrolled. But millions of eligible households have yet to sign up. So help us get out the word. Work with us to make sure that the people you know in the communities where you live are aware of this program and know how to sign up—and we have grant opportunities upcoming to help you do so, so stay tuned.

For the most part, I have been talking about *what* the FCC is doing for Tribal communities. Now I want to close with a brief story about *why*.

At the end of last year on a tour of Tribal Lands, I visited the Pueblo of Isleta. Right in the center of the community, with the Sandia Mountains rising majestically in the background, is the St. Augustine Church. This is a really striking building in New Mexico. The church was built from field stone and is covered in plaster that has been bleached bright white by the unrelenting sun. It is a grand monument to culture and community. It's also old; really old. It dates back to 1613.

It has stood tall *for centuries*—generation after generation after generation has gathered and worshipped here. And it is a reminder of just how long Native communities have been on this land and the moral obligation we have to those communities. Because the first people to live on this land should not be the last to benefit from the digital age. You have my commitment that I will work with you to bring high-speed connections to everyone, everywhere Tribal lands, included.

Thank you—and let's get to work.

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